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# McFarlane tightens foreign policy grip

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WASHINGTON — Moving under a cover of dullness, Robert C. McFarlane has quietly cemented his hold on the top foreign policy post in the White House, a job he received almost by default 16 months ago.

Most recently, Mr. McFarlane effortlessly withstood a fierce post-election campaign by foreign policy hard-liners to persuade President Reagan to replace him as national security adviser with U.N. Ambassador Jeane J. Kirkpatrick.

There now is widespread belief that — rather than facing the ax — Mr. McFarlane has won both the respect and the confidence of Mr. Reagan — and is still on the way up.

"I think he has the skills and I think he is accumulating the kind of experience that would make him a natural candidate to be secretary of state or secretary of defense in the future," said Richard R. Burt, assistant secretary of state for European affairs.

Said another high official:

"The only thing that could happen to Bud to cause him not to be national security adviser is a change in the cabinet that would present an opportunity to promote him."

If there is a rap against Mr. McFarlane within the administration, it is that he is too much of a conciliator, inevitably inclined to split the difference when trying to achieve a consensus among advisers on a tough issue — arms control, for example.

For that quality alone, Mr. McFarlane seems tailor-made to serve a president with a legendary preference for consensus over confrontation.

At the same time, or so the complaint goes, the pending talks on arms control are likely to again bring to the surface sharp differences among key administration players.

There is thus some quiet questioning of whether the country is best served by someone inclined toward putting together what might be viewed as a patchwork consensus, rather than saying, in effect:

"You're right — and you're wrong."

Mr. McFarlane, 47, a former Ma-

rine Corps officer, refused to be interviewed for this article, saying through an aide that he did not want to talk about himself.

Much to the amusement of Mr. McFarlane's associates, by the time press accounts of the conservative campaign against him on behalf of Mrs. Kirkpatrick had surfaced, the president had already asked him to remain on the job.

"Obviously some people wanted Jeane to get the job, but he was so solid, I don't think [the drive for Mrs. Kirkpatrick] was a starter," said one senior administration official. "His performance in the job is what made him solid."

This official and others pointed out that Mr. McFarlane was at Mr. Reagan's side through some of the president's most trying days — the Grenada invasion, the terrorist bombing of the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, the withdrawal from Lebanon, the Soviet breakoff of arms-control negotiations and the drive to force resumption of these talks.

Mr. McFarlane's job performance was by no means the only factor accounting for his longevity, other sources said.

"He didn't head it off," said one official of the abortive Kirkpatrick movement. "Others headed it off for him."

According to this explanation, the White House chief of staff, James A. Baker III, and Secretary of State George P. Shultz were so opposed to having Mrs. Kirkpatrick take over the job that they stepped in, and Mr. McFarlane was the beneficiary.

To some degree, Mr. McFarlane has advanced in the hierarchy through his ability to avoid drawing attention to himself. This is made all the easier by a monotonous way of speaking, a non-confrontational manner and a bland visage that rarely shows emotion.

"Bud is so dull," one official said, "by the time he gets to his third sentence, you've forgotten what his first sentence was."

"He was created by God to disappear into crowds," said Paul M. Weyrich, a leader of the conservative New Right movement.

One official, asked if he had ever

seen Mr. McFarlane display a human foible, replied, "I've never even seen his facial expression change."

In a more serious vein, officials said Mr. McFarlane has made an effort to avoid upstaging Secretary of State Shultz in the foreign policy arena and has cultivated Mr. Reagan's other key national security aides, Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger and the CIA director, William J. Casey.

Some conservatives said that Mr. Shultz — no favorite of the right wing — is the key to Mr. McFarlane's survival. They said Mr. McFarlane defers to the secretary of State on policy matters and also on public appearances.

"No matter how much McFarlane blossoms, his ability to influence events lasts as long as his views coincide with George Shultz's," said Richard A. Viguerie, publisher of *Conservative Digest*.

Mr. McFarlane got the national security post, in part, by avoiding the crossfire in one of the legendary White House turf wars, this one in the tumultuous aftermath of James G. Watt's resignation as the Interior secretary.

As one official told the story, the president was walking to a meeting at which he planned to tell Secretary Weinberger and Director Casey that he had decided to name Mr. Baker as his new national security adviser.

Walking with the president was William P. Clark, who then held the job but had been named to replace Mr. Watt. Casually, almost as an afterthought, Mr. Reagan informed Mr. Clark of his intention.

According to the story, Mr. Clark gulped, diverted the president to another room and told him Mr. Baker would be unacceptable to Mr. Weinberger and Mr. Casey, both of whom had clashed with Mr. Baker in the past. So, for that matter, had Mr. Clark.

The Baker appointment was quickly scrubbed. Then there was some talk of Mrs. Kirkpatrick, but that was likely to face resistance from other quarters.

Finally — in part because no one had any major objection to Mr. McFarlane — the president smiled on him.